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The Ordination of Women in the American Church

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Introduction

In 1853, Antoinette Brown became the first woman ordained as a Christian minister in a major American denomination. Brown was ordained by a small Congregational church in South Butler, New York. Even before this, she had already achieved some significant firsts. She was one of the first women to obtain a degree from a co-educational college, the progressive Oberlin College, run by the Arminian-tinged New School Presbyterians, which had begun admitting women around 1840. Believing she was called to ministerial work, Brown was not content with the literary course prescribed for women. She petitioned the faculty to allow her to take the advanced theological course, which was limited to men. Eventually, the faculty relented and allowed her to take the course-work. She was the first woman to do so, but the faculty refused to award her the actual degree.[1]

Undaunted, Brown entered the field, and looked for a ministerial opportunity, lecturing in the meantime on temperance, slavery, and literary topics. Her acceptance and eventual ordination by the Congregational church in New York was a satisfying and symbolic moment, celebrated with a fiery sermon by a Wesleyan Methodist preacher. Not only did Brown achieve her goal of ordination, but it was within a church that in many ways represented the most distinguished religious heritage of the country—the Congregational church being the most direct ecclesiastical heir of the venerable New England Puritans.

This first ordination, however, did not really represent the decisive beginning of a new era of women's leadership in American Christianity. The Congregational church, due to its localized leadership structure, had the capacity to make unique decisions without having to wrestle with difficult questions on a denominational-wide basis. The fact that one, small, socially-progressive church in New York would decide to have a female pastor said little about the denomination as a whole. (Though, as the local conference did need to approve such appointments, it says something about at least a certain region of New York at the time.)

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[1] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women's Ministries Within the United Church of Christ," *in* Catherine Wessinger, ed., *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 67-68.

But over thirty-five years later, in 1889, the national Congregational yearbook listed only four ordained women ministers. Like Brown, they served as, quite literally, the exceptions that proved the general rule of male ministerial leadership. As one local conference put it, "while we do not approve of the ordination of women to the Eldership of the church, as a general rule, yet as Sister Melissa Timmons has been set forward to that position at the request of her church . . . we send her credential letters of an ordained minister."[2]

By that time, however, Brown herself was no longer in the Congregational ministry. Indeed, within a handful of years of her ordination, she encountered health difficulties, and doctrinal doubts, and resigned from the pastorate. She spent several years lecturing and speaking, until in 1878 she joined the Unitarian church. There, she was recognized as an ordained Unitarian minister.

Brown's challenging experiences as a pastor are unsurprising, given the tenor and climate of her culture and times, and her role as trailblazer. But her pathway, from the gender-conservative Presbyterians, to a more flexible group of Congregationalists, who allowed the Methodist preacher at her ordination, and her later move to the "broad-minded" Unitarians, illustrates in a single life the complexity of views that existed in mid-19th century America on women's ministry. It is this varied religious background that is the foundation from which 20th century developments in women's ministry and ordination must be understood, as the first Protestant churches to ordain women did so in the United States.[3]

A book could be written for each denomination's experience of grappling with the ordination question. Fortunately, one book has been written based on a detailed study of the reaction of the 100 largest American denominations to the issue of

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[2] Ibid., 68.

[3] Some suggest that some of the early European Anabaptists ordained women, but the evidence of this is thin and does not seem to be supported by the early primary sources. See Dennis Bollinger, *First-Generation Anabaptist Ecclesiology, 1525-1561* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 169, fn. 533. Whether such groups did ordain at some early point, by the time of the 17th and 18th centuries there is no record of them continuing to do so. Hence, the history of the church in America is central to understanding the dynamics of how women's ordination entered modern Protestantism, and became an issue for the Adventist church.

women's ordination. Entitled *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, the author, sociologist Mark Chaves, looks at both internal church factors, including theology and organization, and external societal pressures, such as women's rights movements and political pressures, to understand how various American churches dealt with the ordination question.[4]

Chaves's book is a valuable resource, but his questions as a sociologist differ somewhat from my concerns as a historian and theologian. I tend to give more weight and attention to theological matters. His work provides a framework and some data for this paper. Most notable is his breakdown of the 44 denominations that have chosen to ordain women, including the dates they made the decision, and the reason for the decision.[5] I have added to Chaves's list, by attempting to both bring it up to date, as well as adding information about church population and growth, as well as the attitude of these denominations towards homosexuality.

Both sides on the ordination discussion in the Adventist church have made various claims about the impact of ordaining women on both church growth, as well as on the likelihood women's ordination leading to biblical liberalism, including the acceptance of homosexual behavior within the church. I wanted to test these claims by looking at the experience of other denominations. I have included my expanded version of his list in the Appendix to this paper.

Due to space limitations and manageability, for purposes of my analysis I have chosen to group Chaves's list of churches into five categories based on historical affiliations and theological connections. These groups are as follows: 1. Biblically Unorthodox (Quakers, Universalists, Unitarians, Christian Science, Mormons); 2. Sacramental (Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, High Lutheran); 3. Calvinist/Reformed (Presbyterian, Congregational, Particular Baptists), 4. Methodist/Wesleyan/Pentecostal 5. Restorationists (Christians, Adventists, Baptists, Mennonites).

The groupings themselves do not indicate whether women's ordination will be accepted or rejected. But the groupings do indicate a pattern of similar experiences and questions that are involved in dealing with gender and ordination. The experiences of

[4] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.)
[5] Ibid.,16-17.

many of these groups will be helpful as Adventists consider their options in relation to the ordination issue.

Before the experiences of these groups are considered, a brief historical sketch will be provided of the moments in American history when women's ministry and ordination became issues of important concern. This history will be told, with some exception, without reference to the particular groups, as all groups essentially experienced and were subject to the same social and historical forces produced by these larger historical events. After the historical sketch, each of the five groups will be considered in turn, with a focus on the experiences that might be relevant for our own church. The paper will conclude with some observations on how this history may help us chart our future.

A. Historical overview

Questions of gender and ministry are not a constant concern of churches, but arise from time to time in relation to both internal church developments and to events in society. The five moments when the issue of women and ministry came to the foreground in American religion are as follows: 1. The Great Awakenings of the mid 18th and early 19th centuries; 2. the first women's rights movement of the mid-to-late 19th century; 3. the spread of fundamentalism and liberalism in the early 20th century; 4. the second women's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and; 5. the ascent of total equality as the central American legal and social doctrine at the end of the 20th century. This overview will provide the context in which the experiences of the various denominational groups can be understood.

A. The Great Awakenings – Women Prophesyers and Exhorters

While Antoinette Brown may have been the first American woman ordained to the gospel ministry, she was certainly not the first woman preacher. Catherine Breckus has masterfully documented and recorded the extensive history of female "public prophesying," as preaching was often called, in the century and more prior to Brown's

appointment.[6] Women's involvement in public preaching and exhorting clustered around the two great revival events in American history, the First and Second Great Awakenings. Both events challenged social and cultural conventions in ways that opened doors for minorities, including blacks and women, to play roles of public leadership that had previously been denied them.

The First Great Awakening began in the 1740s with the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and the Wesley brothers. The emphasis on individual, public conversion, the importance of both mind and emotion, and the equality of believers before God, led to a challenge of social mores. "Wives rebuked husbands for their lack of piety; children evangelized their parents; the clergy undermined one another; lay men became exhorters; and even women refused to keep silent in church . . . . "[7] Many "new light" leaders, as the revivalist preachers were called, allowed women to share their testimonies of conversion in public meetings.

Many of the early Baptist and Methodist meetings were out of doors, and this female preaching was thus less offensive to traditional sensibilities than if it had taken place in churches. Women acted as prayer leaders, exhorters, and finally preachers, but as "most meetings were held outdoors . . . the objections of those who might have been offended if a women stood behind the pulpit were eased."[8] Inside the church, women were still not allowed to formally preach from the pulpit, but the Baptists, Methodists, and the "new light," Separate Congregationalists allowed women to function as exhorters in meetings, sharing testimonies and information scriptural messages from the pews. Again, this openness to "prophesying and exhorting" should not be confused with women being ordained as elders or pastors.[9]

The role of women in speaking and exhorting in public generally diminished as the revivals subsided. Periods of dynamic charisma and growth turn into times of

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[6] Catherine Brekus, *Female Preaching in America: Strangers and Pilgrims 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
[7] Ibid., 34.
[8] Wolff, Joseph, "women, ordination of," in *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (Gordon Melton, 2005), found at protestantism.enacademic.com/642/women, ordination of (accessed on 5/28/2013.)
[9] Breckus, 48-51.

consolidation and institution building, where traditional roles reassert themselves. Ironically, the revolutionary war period was a time of conventional gender roles even in the "new light" churches. It was not until the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening in the 1790s and early 1800s that women once again began to make an appearance as exhorters and preachers.[10]

The Second Great Awakening saw even greater female involvement in both exhorting and preaching than the First. Breckus documents about one hundred evangelical women who preached in the revivals of late 18th and early 19th century America, among a broad range of religious groups. The Christian Connection, the Freewill Baptists, the Methodists, the African Methodists, and the Millerites allowed women exhorters and preachers to address mixed crowds of men and women. At times these were in outdoor and prayer meeting settings, but it also included the preaching of sermons from pulpits.[11]

These religious groups existed on the edge of the social margins, and part of their dissent against the establishment was in their willingness to allow a wider range of religious voices, including women's, to be heard. Yet certain women preachers came from, and preached to, more "respectable" audiences. Harriet Livermore was a gifted evangelist and speaker, and was from a well-to-do family, the daughter and granddaughter of U.S. Congressmen. She was invited to preach to overflow crowds in the U.S. House of Representatives on four separate occasions between 1827 and 1843.[12]

Breckus acknowledges, however, that these evangelical preachers from the awakenings were "biblical" rather than "secular" feminists. Their arguments in favor of women preaching were based on the Bible, rather than natural rights, and they believed in what might be called a complementerian division of labor and authority. They "never asked for permission to baptize" or "give the Lord's Supper." Nor "did they broach the forbidden topic of female ordination." As Livermore herself described her view of the Bible's teaching on ordination, "I conclude that it belongs only to the male sex." Though

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[10] Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 44-47.
[11] Breckus, 7-11.
[12] Breckus, 1, 12, 18.

she lived for another two decades after the Seneca Falls women's rights convention of 1848, she never demanded full leadership equality with men.[13]

B. First Women's Rights Movement – Mid-to-Late 19th Century

As the revivals of the Second Great Awakening waned, a movement for women's political and social equality began to ferment in circles that had worked for slavery abolition and temperance reform. Scholars point to the 1848 Seneca Falls convention as the beginning of modern feminism in the United States. There were certainly precursors to this event in England and Europe, and two distinct influences helped instigate the movement, one religious, the other rooted in the egalitarian skepticism of the French revolution.

Feminist scholars have recognized the important influence of evangelists Charles Finney's practice of allowing men and women to pray aloud and exhort in public religious gatherings.[14] This religious heritage was seen at Seneca Falls in the active role that religious Quaker women, such as Lucretia Mott, and the location itself, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.[15]

But the other strand of skeptical influence was also well established by this time. This strand harkened back to the likes of British author Mary Wollstonecraft, who defended the French Revolution, lived in basically an open marriage, and wrote the feminist touchstone, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.[16] This secular approach to the rights of women was well represented at Seneca Falls by the skeptical Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was later responsible for the provocative and revisionist *The Women's Bible*. Published in the 1890s, this work viewed the Genesis creation account as "myth and fable," applauded the independence and "natural curiosity" of Eve, and

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[13] Breckus, 7.
[14] Janet Wilson James, "Women in American Religious History: An Overview," in *Women in American Religion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 7.
[15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seneca_Falls_Convention#Reform_movement
[16] Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement 1830-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54-55.

advocated praying to the trinity of "a heavenly Mother, Father, and Son."[17]

These religious and secular strands of the women's liberation movement existed in uneasy tension for a time, until the secularist wing, led by Stanton as well as agnostic Susan B. Anthony became the predominant influences in the 1880s and 90s. It was the influence of these "secular" feminists that kept the "biblical" feminists like Harriet Livermore and Ellen White at arms length from this movement, despite their shared concerns on issues of slavery and temperance.

It is important to recognize that churches of this period were contending with at least two versions of feminism. One took seriously scriptural teaching regarding the roles of men and women, but felt that the roles had been too narrowly understood, in preventing women from speaking and acting in public, whether in the church or in society. This group still upheld male headship in the home, and often in the church as well, generally retaining the role of ordained elder and pastor for men. This position is often described as complementarianism.

The other kind of feminism proceeded from essentially philosophical commitments to abstract notions of equality, and sought to treat men and women as essentially interchangeable entities with little or no role differential. This position would describe those egalitarians who reject male headship even in the home, as well as the more extreme versions identified as secular or liberal feminism.

Depending on their biblical and social orientations, churches reacted similarly or differently to both versions. In embracing a "biblical" feminism, allowing women complementarian roles in teaching, preaching, and evangelism, a church may still have rejected the "secular" version, which tended to call for equality in all areas of leadership. A certain historical confusion has been created by an oversight of these important distinctions.

C. The late 19th century rise of fundamentalism and liberalism

The rise of the first women's rights movement was one symptom of an

[17] Ibid., 168-172; New York Times, March 7, 1896, Mrs. W. Winslow Crannell. Her View of the "Woman's Bible."; What a Correspondent Says of Objections: Offered to Work. (viewed on June 9, 2013).

underlying ideological challenge to social, cultural and religious authority that also provoked the religious responses that historians call fundamentalism and liberalism. These two opposing, yet philosophically connected, religious responses impacted basically all religious groups in America, and indeed in the West.[18]

Fundamentalism is typically associated with the biblical conservative and socially insular reactions against evolution and Biblical higher criticism of the early 20th century. Such reactions are seen in the 1878 Niagara Bible Conference Creed, the Scopes Monkey Trial, where evolution was put on trial, and the twelve-volume set of *The Fundamentals*, a defense of the Bible against higher criticism published between 1910 and 1915.[19]

Historians of fundamentalism have placed the core of fundamentalism, however, a bit earlier than these events, when the doctrine of Biblical verbal inerrancy was formulated in the sophisticated environs of Princeton University in the mid-19th century.[20] This occurred under the guidance of Professor Charles Hodge in the 1840s and 50s, and then under his son Archibald Hodge, and his son's colleague Benjamin Warfield, in the 1870s to the turn of the century.[21] The Hodges and Warfield insisted on verbal, dictation type of inspiration that was not part of historic Protestantism. Rather, it was an innovation to meet the new "scientific" standards of objectivity required in the minds of many in the modern age.

This attempt to completely objectify the Bible conflated the standards used in the separate fields of empirical science and historical inquiry. It tried to hold Christian belief to standards the Bible itself did not envision, and that science itself could not

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[18] For a discussion of how liberalism and fundamentalism actually draw on the same, non-biblical, philosophical foundationalism, see Miller, Nicholas, "Divided by Visions of the Truth: The Bible, Epistemology, and the Adventist Community," Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 47, No. 2, 241-262 (2009).

[19] Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenerianism, 1800-1930* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1970), 140-141, 273-277.

[20] Sandeen, 114-121; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

[21] Mark Noll ed., *The Princeton Theology: 1812-1921* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1983, 2001), 30-33, 165-166, 218-220.

actually meet. This did not, however, deter the determined dogmatists.[22] In their goal to adhere to an objective and scientific model, the Princeton theologians developed a biblical system that was rigid, inflexible, and socially conservative.

Charles Hodge wrote in defense of slavery, and in opposition to any public role for women in the church, or in society at large for that matter. Not only was Hodge opposed to women's ordination, but also to female preaching, and even women's involvement in the reform and benevolence societies of the day.[23] A few years later in the 1880s, Benjamin Warfield supported the revival of the New Testament order of deaconesses, so as to "relieve the embarrassments we have had to stop [women] from preaching in the Presbyterian churches." Warfield believed that Paul's injunctions against women speaking in the churches were "precise, absolute, and all inclusive."[24]

Not all biblically conservative churches held either to the verbal, dictation model of scripture, nor to the Princetonians rigidly defined view of gender limitations. As we have already discussed, a number of biblically conservative churches allowed for women's public praying, exhortation, and even preaching. But as the strife between liberals and fundamentalists began to heat up, more and more biblically conservative denominations were influenced by both concepts of verbal inspiration, as well as narrower gender roles.

An important point to recognize is that, as there were at least two types of feminism in the 19th century, so there were at least two different views of gender roles in most biblically-conservative churches. The Princetonian view, which worked its way more broadly into fundamentalism and churches affected by it, had a very narrow and circumscribed view of women in ministry. They forbade not just ordination, but also women teaching and preaching in church, as well as taking other kinds of active, public roles in mixed-gender settings.

This rigid and limited view of the women's role in the church and society is often referred to as patriarchy (though this modern, fundamentalist model should not be

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[22] Sandeen, 116-118.
[23] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentlism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 35.
[24] Ibid., 36.

identified with the Bible's description of the patriarchs). This fundamentalist patriarchy stands in contrast to the practices of other biblically conservative churches which, while not often accepting women's ordination to presiding elder or pastor, did allow for a much more extensive role for women in preaching, evangelism, teaching, and other kinds of leadership. This more flexible view has, as we earlier noted, been referred to as complementarianism. (As we discuss below, a few biblically conservative churches in this period did appear to accept, at least in theory, an egalitarianism, which made no gender distinction in relation to church office.) As with the case of "biblical" versus "secular" feminism, the failure to distinguish between patriarchal and complementarian positions has also been the cause of much historical confusion. Our Adventist pioneers were not, on the whole patriarchal, but defended the ability of women to preach and evangelize in church, though they did not extend full pastoral ordination to women. Thus, they held a classic complementarian position.

In the 1910s and 1920s, as fundamentalism spread, many churches that had been complementarian in nature, with very active women's reformist, missionary, and benevolence societies, became more patriarchal. These women's groups were often placed under the oversight of committees controlled by men, or discontinued altogether. This was often triggered as a reaction against liberal churches and factions that advocated for the kind of full and total equality, or sameness of role and function, in church that the secular feminists were calling for in civil society.[25]

This spread of liberal theology, with the movement to read Old Testament stories as myths, and to view the New Testament as being heavily influenced by culture in relation gender teachings, that opened up many of the mainline churches to full gender equality, including all forms of ministry, preaching and ordination. As Chaves notes, the first women's liberation movement dissipated by the 1920s. It did not resurge until the late 1960s and 1970s.[26] Yet ten major denominations implemented women's ordination in the period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, including Reformed/Presbyterian churches and various Methodists.[27]

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[25] Bendroth, 55-60.
[26] Chaves, 160-161.
[27] Chaves, 16-17.

Some of this change can be attributed to the social upheavals caused by World War II. But the leavening of the mainline denominations by higher Biblical criticism is also an important part of the story. The spread of this liberal approach to the Bible was enhanced by the rise of the ecumenical movement in the 1950s and 1960s, as a focus on social justice, and a move away from strong biblical positions, made for a greater possibility of unity among various branches of Protestantism.

But again, a distinction needs to be made between those churches, generally mainline Protestant, that embraced a biblically liberal, feminist agenda, and those that accepted egalitarian arguments from an essentially biblically conservative view, such as Pentecostal, Weslyan Holiness churches, and African Methodist churches. Some churches that allow for women's ordination, such as the Conservative Congregationalists, are strongly opposed to any interfaith activity. As we will see in our discussion of the various groups below, women's ordination did not necessarily go hand-in-hand with biblical liberalism. While a correlation exists between biblically-liberal denominations and women's ordination, to conflate the two would be a historical mistake. We will take a closer look at these connections in our discussion of the various groups below.

D. The Second Women's Rights Movement – 1960s to 1970s

Unsurprisingly, the rise of a secular feminism in the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s produced a new wave of denominations adopting women's ordination, including Presbyterians, many Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Mennonites.[28] This flurry of changes ended in 1979, and with the rise of the conservative Reagan years, no more major denominations made the switch throughout the 1980s or most of the 1990s. Indeed, at least one major denomination, the Southern Baptists, reversed their position on ordaining women pastors in the 1990s.[29] It was during this second round of women's rights advocacy that the issue of women's ordination became a significant one for the Adventist church.

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[28] Chaves, 17.

[29] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Baptist_Convention#cite_ref-women_57-0 (viewed on 6/10/2013).

While another paper is being presented on Adventism and women's ordination, it is worth noting here that it is quite apparent that Adventism during the early to mid 20th century had been influenced by fundamentalism, and moved from the complementarian camp, into the patriarchal camp. This was evidenced by the almost complete lack of female leadership in many church circles in the mid 20th century, including the absence of women evangelists and preachers that were far more common in the pioneer days.[30] It was also shown by an unequal pay scale, contrary to the counsels of Ellen White, which was afforded female employees. The Church suffered an embarrassing legal defeat at the hands of a book editor, Merikay Silver, during the 1970s, that helped begin to nudge it out of its patriarchal ways, and back towards its complementarian roots.[31]

F. The New Civil Rights: Equality as Sameness - 1980s to the Present.

The second women's rights movement was one symptom of a larger cultural shift in America that impacted a wide array of social issues in the late 60s and early 70s. The turbulence of the anti-war demonstrations, the rise of a protest culture, the outbreak of the sexual revolution, and the questioning of all gender roles—in short the quest to break down all societal distinctions in the name of a broad-based notion of equality—led to what has become almost a permanent cultural divide in our country that has left no institution, public or private, untouched. The Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village, New York, in 1969 announced the beginnings of another kind of gender revolution—gay rights.

This movement rapidly morphed from simply trying to remove criminal penalties and the stigma of mental illness, to one that sought acceptance, legal and

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[30] This shift can be graphically seen on the wall outside the office of the Treasurer in the General Conference building where pictures of all the GC Treasurers are hung. In observing that wall, I noticed that in the first thirty years of the office during the late 19th century, no less than three women served as GC Treasurer. Since the beginning of the 20th century, no women have served in that position. The influence of Fundamentalism on Adventism in the 1920s and 30s, especially in terms of a rigid view of inspiration, has been well documented by George Knight in his *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 128-138.

[31] http://www.vfa.us/MERIKAY%20McLEOD.htm (accessed on 6/10/2013).

social equality, and in more recent years, full marriage rights for LGBT couples. Churches that had accepted women's ordination in the mid-to-late 20th century began to experience pressure to normalize homosexual behavior, and even to ordain practicing gays. Beginning in the 1980s, a number of churches, mostly mainline, liberal denominations began to do so. This trend has continued into the 2000s, with the Episcopal and the American Lutheran Church voting to ordain practicing gays in 2009. However, a number of biblically conservative churches that ordain women have resisted the acceptance of homosexuality.

These groups include the historically black African Methodist churches, conservative Congregational churches, Pentecostal churches, and churches arising from the Weslyan holiness tradition, including the Salvation Army. Thus, it is not historically true to say that all churches that embrace women's ordination are also likely to embrace homosexual practice. Much is dependent on the theological context and reasons they use to move forward on ordination. There is some evidence, though, that at least some of these conservative churches are facing greater internal challenges on the issue of homosexuality than is faced in church's that have not accepted women's ordination. These issues will be looked at more closely as we examine the various groups in the section below.

F. Four Historical Views

In telling the above history, at least four different approaches to gender and leadership emerge. Understanding these four groups will help us understand the evolving and shifting approaches of the various churches that we examine below. The four approaches, just roughly outlined, are as follows:[32]

[32] This chart is my own creation, though I draw on existing terminology for the four categories. But in defining these categories, I draw from my reading of the history of the various denominations and their differing approaches. These are rough historical typologies, and there will be disagreement over how the elements of each category are defined, and whether there other categories between these listed categories. But this crude overview will give a general sense of how various churches have shifted over time.

View	Patriarchal/ Fundamentalist	Complementary/ Evangelical	Egalitarian/ Evangelical	Liberal/ Feminist
Pre-Fall	Male headship; Adam had authority over Eve	Male leadership & representation; each authority in own roles, but no authority "over"	gender roles; but no overall leadership	Roles entirely based on individual capacities apart from gender
Post-Fall	Male headship intensified and extended to all elements of church and society	Male headship created; man is primary leader of family and spiritual leader in church	Male headship results from fall; but only in family, not in church	Male headship purely descriptive result of sin; roles not gender related
Home	Man in charge of spiritual and temporal affairs; women confined to home matters	Man provides oversight, but woman in charge of many things in home; man first among equal partners	Man provides oversight, but woman in charge of many things; aim for equal partnership	Equal partnership with roles based on skills and gifts, not gender
Church	Men in charge; women's role limited to teaching children and other women	Men have primary ecclesiastical authority, but women can teach, preach, and evangelize to all audiences	No gender roles in relation to any church offices or positions.	No gender roles in relation to any church offices or positions
Society	Women should not have public roles	Woman may have public roles, balanced with domestic roles	Gender makes no difference for public life	Gender makes no difference for public life

In discussing the various church groupings, we will discover that there is not only a variety of the above views within a single grouping, but also that individual churches move among several of the views over periods of time. Some churches have embraced all four views, though usually at different times. A strong embrace by large factions of a single denomination of differing views at the same time has usually led to schism.

II. Church Groupings

A. Group 1 – Historically Biblically Unorthodox Churches

The name of this group is not a subjective evaluation of the non-scriptural nature of the group's teachings. Rather it is an assessment of the formal position the group holds to the authority of the scriptures. So, this group includes those churches that have historically rejected the divine or ultimate authority of the scriptures, such as: the Unitarian/Universalists, theosophists, and spiritualists; groups that place the "inner light" above scripture, such as the Quakers; or groups that place their own revelation as superior to scripture, such as the Christian Scientists or Mormons. I do not include those groups that have embraced biblical higher criticism, and have placed secular reason over scripture, as most of these churches historically had higher commitments to scripture, and will thus be discussed as part of the groups to which they originally belonged.[33]

The historically unorthodox group will not require much attention, as they are least like the Adventist church. This group as a whole usually embraced women's ordination early on, but has members that continue to oppose it, including the Mormons. The LDS church lives on the border between the Patriarchal and Complementary views. The reality is, that as most of the denominations within this group do not take the Bible as supremely authoritative, when secular society or culture begins to press another way, they rather readily follow. Thus, most of this group embraced women's ordained leadership during the first round of women's rights in the late 19th century.

While this biblically unorthodox group that supports ordination exists, it is not the direct historical impetus, template, or example that caused more biblically conservative church's to consider, and at times adopt, women's ordination. Indeed, most conservative evangelical churches were openly critical of all these unorthodox groups. That these groups were among the first to ordain women would have made most of the evangelical churches less likely, not more, to adopt it themselves. Thus, it is not correct that the women's equality movement came into the biblically-conservative Christian churches

[33] For an overview of a number of various unorthodox, outsider groups in relation to female leadership, see Bednarowski, Mary Farrell, "Outside the Mainstream: Women's Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* XLVIII/2, 207-231.

primarily or even secondarily through spiritualism or mysticism, as some at times argue. Any such influence will be very indirect, tenuous, and peripheral, if it can be shown to exist at all.

B. Group 2 – Sacramental and High Churches

Another group far removed from Adventism in history and theology is the churches that embrace some form of sacramentalism in their theology and ritual. This group, made up mostly of Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, also includes some high church Protestants, such as Anglo-Catholics and some conservative Lutherans. Churches that are sacramental believe that the ordinances, such as communion and baptism, are means of physically transferring the grace and presence of God to the participating believer, rather than just being a symbol of an underlying spiritual reality.[34]

In the sacramental churches, the form and manner of the performance of the ritual is a key part of the function, and the manner can extend to the identity of the priest or officiant, which includes his gender. The priest is understood to be "iconic" of Christ, and as his agent, must resemble him in various ways, including his maleness. As Chaves notes, "by this logic, it is literally impossible for a woman to be a priest; the sacrament if performed by a woman, would not be valid."[35] Those churches that embrace sacramentalism also have a strong regard for the authoritative role of tradition. The tradition of male-priesthood, and of arguments like the iconic argument, which it rooted in tradition rather than the New Testament, are given very strong weight in these denominations. It would appear to be this tradition, as much as, if not more than, the logic of sacramentalism, that causes them to persist with male-only ordination.

Because of the strength of this sacramental tradition, very few historically sacramental churches have considered the women's ordination option. The few that have are those that represent a broad outlook on the sacraments within their denominations. For instance, the Anglican and Episcopal churches are well known for being home to a wide range of theological persuasions, from evangelical, to moderate, to high church. It turns out that the two opposite wings, the biblically conservative evangelical wing, and the high church, Anglo-Catholic wing, both oppose women's ordination, though for

[34] Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 84-85, fn. 2.
[35] Ibid., 86.

different reasons—the high church group for reasons relating to sacrament and tradition, the evangelical wing for reasons relating to biblical teaching. The moderate middle, which had a lower view of both scripture and tradition, quite overwhelmingly favored the ordination of women at nearly 72% clergy support.[36]

As the moderate, biblically-liberal middle group expanded, and the pressure from the second women's equality movement of the 1960s and 1970s increased, resistance to ordination was overcome, especially in those countries where church tradition and history was not strong, such as the English-speaking countries outside of Britain. The American and Canadian Anglican/Episcopal Churches approved ordination in 1976, followed by New Zealand in 1977. In 1992, the Church of England did so, followed by many other Anglican/Episcopal churches around the world.[37] Currently, most of these churches are expanding women's leadership role to include bishop and higher. At the same time, ordination is also being opened to actively gay priests and bishops

Adventism is historically neither sacramental nor iconic in its understanding of communion or baptism. The underlying temptation to reify and sacralize symbols and signs is a temptation for all believers, including Adventists, and we need to be careful not to endow any religious ritual or practice or person with more spiritual authority and power than is biblically appropriate. But as a historical matter, the sacramental and traditional arguments for male leadership in the church are not those that have historically caused the Adventist church to ordain only men to the gospel ministry. Rather, Adventists have far more in common with the evangelical wing of Anglicanism, which has centrally biblical concerns about the issue.

Both the conservatives and the "progressives" need to be cautious about over-using the sacramental churches as an example or foil for their respective positions. It is simply not true, as some progressives propose, that Adventists that oppose women's ordination are drawing on, either explicitly or implicitly, sacramental or traditionally iconic arguments. Indeed, conservatives are more likely to be influenced away from

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[36] Nason-Clark, Nancy, "Ordaining Women as Priests: Religious vs. Sexist Explanations for Clerical Attitudes," *Sociological Analysis* 1987, 48, 3:264-65, 268.

[37] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women_in_the_Anglican_Communion#First_ordinations (viewed on 6/25/2013).

these arguments precisely because they clash with underlying commitments to the authority of scripture and the priesthood of believers.

On the other hand, conservatives need to be cautious in using the Anglicans' move to ordaining homosexuals as a logical outcome of the arguments for ordination in Adventism. Anglicans embrace of female ordination had to do with the rejection of certain sacramental arguments based on tradition rather than scripture. The underlying theological center of the Anglican Church has been, for the last century or so, quite far on the liberal end. Notwithstanding the Anglican evangelical wing, ennobled by such names as C.S. Lewis and John Stott, the Church's conservative cultural practices were the result of the weight of social establishment inertia rather than meaningful scriptural commitment.

This lack of a scriptural anchor allowed the church to go, in a few short years, from a relatively extreme patriarchy, to a feminist liberalism, leaping entirely over the evangelical options of complementarianism and egalitarianism in between. Without a commitment to the biblical teaching, as the social forces of the 60s and 70s undermined the social establishment, so the Church's commitments were undermined with it, leading on into the gay rights revolution of the 1990s and 2000s, with a similar result for the church.[38]

The Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, some conservative Lutherans, and various breakaway Anglican groups show that commitment to the traditions of sacramentalism, apart from a high view of scripture, can continue to hold at bay both women's ordination and gay rights. But these successes should not cause us to aspire to a sacramental theology; neither should their failures cause us to immediately accuse those with conservative biblical arguments *for* women's ordination of following in the biblically-liberal sacramentarian's inevitable slide into acceptance of homosexuality. While the sacramenterians may provide some lesson for both sides, we are following very different theological pathways from them, and should be very careful in over-applying any lessons from their stories.

[38] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women_in_the_Anglican_Communion#First_woman_bishop_and_primate (viewed on 6/25/2013.)

C. Group 3 – Calvinist/Reformed Churches

Somewhat closer to the Adventist heritage, but still a step or two removed, is that part of the magisterial reformation represented by the churches associated with the Calvinist/Reformed tradition. With a high view of God's sovereignty and power, and a low view of human nature and natural ability, representative churches from this tradition include Presbyterians, Congregationalists (the denomination of the early American Puritans), and the particular Baptists. Their view of scripture is particularly interesting, as they have tended, as a group, to oscillate between extremes, moving at times from a rigid biblical fideism to an extreme liberal view of scripture.

After the period of the First Great Awakening in the mid-18th century, and partially responding to the civilly enforced biblical conservatism of the New England Congregationalists, certain pastors within that denomination began pushing back, and experimenting with theories of universalism and Unitarianism. Eventually, they developed both the Unitarian and Universalist denominations, and also contributed to the theologically liberal, panentheist, transcendentalist movement of the early 19th century. These were among the first groups to embrace women's ordination.

The biblically conservative reformed churches tended to embrace a rather extreme patriarchal outlook, forbidding not only women's ordination, but also opposing women preaching or teaching in mixed public settings. That Antoinette Brown, the first woman ordained in America, was a Congregationalist minister says much more about the polity of the church than its theology. Due to its congregational organization, a local, liberal church, could take ordain a woman, but as a whole, Congregationalists were quite opposed to women's ministry.

Indeed, as we discussed in the historical section, the extreme biblical conservatism of the Congregational theologians at Princeton, where verbal inerrancy was developed, went hand-in-hand with a social conservatism that forbade women from teaching, preaching, and other public roles. This combination of Biblical rigidity and social conservatism was bequeathed to the larger fundamentalists movement, which was looking for weapons with which to push back against the liberal higher Biblical criticism coming over from Germany in the late 19th century.

The Princetonian verbal inerrancy provided one response to the liberal assault.

But many denominations did not see the liabilities that came with it: an artificially rigid view of scripture, a socially conservative outlook, and a strongly patriarchal view of the role of women. As we will see below, many non-reformed denominations that were at least complementarian in their orientation in the mid-to-late 19th century, including, as earlier discussed, Seventh-day Adventists, moved over into a version of patriarchy in the early 20th century, because of the influence of the new fundamentalistic outlook.

The Presbyterians and Congregationalists themselves were quite impacted by their own extreme positions. The dogmatism and inflexibility of the conservatives led to a schism, with the most conservative group starting their own seminary and church. This conservative breakaway survived, but did not flourish. With only moderates and liberals remaining in the main Presbyterian Church, the balance of power shifted towards the liberal side of the church. It is this that explains the eventual acceptance of women's ordination by most Presbyterians in 1956.[39]

The mid-20th century was an unusual time for a gender change, as it fell between women's rights movements, the first of which dissipated by the 1920s, the second of which did not ramp up until the late 1960s and 1970s. The timing is explained by the growing influence of biblically liberal theology, which by the 1950s had gained sufficient traction to implement liberal values. Similar things were happening with some of the other mainline denominations, including the Reformed Church (1948) and the Methodists (1956), as the results of the fundamentalist/liberal split continued to play itself out in the American churches. These same churches have, in the period of equality since the 1990s, also accepted the gay rights movement.

A number of conservative reformed churches split off, and continued with a conservative Biblical outlook, but there numbers are quite small (50,000) compared with the main Presbyterian churches (1.9 million.) It is worth noting that, while they are quite small, the conservative reformed churches are growing, whereas the main Presbyterian

[39] A good discussion of the process from the "progressive" view can be found at Carson, Mary & Price, James, "The Ordination of Women and the Function of the Bible," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 59:2 (Summer, 1981), 250-256, and the "conservative" view of the story can be found at Smith, Frank, "Petticoat Presbyterianism: A Century of Debate in American Presbyterianism on the Issue of the Ordination of Women," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51: (1989), 51-76.

churches are rather rapidly dwindling. The conservative reformed churches have also generally accepted the possibility of women's ordination, though leave it up to the local church, the vast majority of which have not chosen to implement it. These conservative Presbyterian churches, however, despite being open to women's ordination, have continued to strongly resist the gay rights' movement. Given their limited size and history, however, their continued viability as a major conservative denomination is in question.[40]

While there exist distinct theological differences between Adventists and the reformed churches, their experiences hold deeply important lessons for all Adventists. We have in one church an illustration of the danger of both strongly conservative, patriarchal positions, and liberal, feminist positions. It can be tempting sometimes, for conservatives to believe that inflexibility will prevent us from heading down a slippery slope. But at times, it is that very inflexibility that actually provokes a strong opposite reaction, leading to the very consequences one hoped to avoid.

The Biblical rigidity and conservatism of the reformed movement lead, at least in part, to both the universalist/Unitarian excesses of the early 19th century, and to the liberal excesses of the 20th century. It was the reformed theologians and leaders of the 19th century that most fiercely defended an artificially rigid view of scriptural inspiration and an overly patriarchal view of gender roles. The result of their efforts were, as a historical matter, the very liberal mainline reformed liberalism of the mid-to-late 20th century. It is true that extreme can easily produce extremes. Like the sacramental churches, the reformed churches tended to go from a conservative patriarchy to a liberal feminism, to the extent of embracing gay rights, in a matter of a few decades, largely jumping over the middle-ground positions of complementarianism or egalitarianism. There are some exceptions within the reformed tradition, but these conservative churches tend to be quite few in number and unable to speak for the denomination as a whole, or even in major part.

The lesson for Adventists does not require much explication. Indulging a strong patriarchy will not protect the church from a slippery slide into liberalism, but rather

[40] See the descriptions in the attached Appendix of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

could be the kind of push that would hasten that in some parts of the church. We need to carefully understand our complementarian roots, and affirm women's ministry and leadership, even as we look for biblically appropriate and faithful ways to do so. A defense of the patriarchal status quo, as the history of the reformed churches shows, will be an inadequate, and even harmful, response to the present crisis over gender and leadership in our church.

D. Group 4 – Methodism - Holiness/Pentecostal/Black Churches

A closer step still to Adventism are the constellation of churches growing out of the Methodist/Wesleyian tradition, from which many of our pioneers came, including Ellen White. These churches are characterized by an Arminian/free will orientation, an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in a changed life of the believer, and, at least historically, a high view of scriptural authority, all elements that characterize Adventism.

Examples of this group include the various Methodist churches, the Wesleyans holiness churches, and the various Pentecostal churches, which had their roots in the holiness movement. The historically black American denominations are almost all connected historically with Methodism, as shown by the "Methodist" and/or "Episcopal" labels that often appear in their names. This is the hardest group to make generalizations about, as the various sub-groups handled the gender and leadership quite differently. The mainstream Methodists tended to be true to their sacramentally-influenced Anglican roots. Early on Wesley and other Methodist leaders allowed for women preachers and exhorters under "extraordinary circumstances," but they did not ordain women to the pastoral role until the liberalizing of their theology in the 1950s and 1960s.[41]

The Wesleyan holiness and Pentecostal churches, with their emphasis on the importance of the influence and gifts of the Holy Spirit, tended to minimize role differentials, and elevate the importance of the unction of the Holy Spirit in choosing whomever it would. The holiness churches and the Pentecostals were among the earliest

[41] John Wesley cautiously supported at least some women preachers as an "extraordinary" call of God to a position generally reserved for men. Jacqueline Field-Bibb, *Women Towards Priesthood* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10-13. But such an extraordinary call did not extend to the actual office of pastor. As one early Methodist leader put it, "but in this extraordinary call I do not consider *any* female strictly and fully called to the *pastoral office* . . ." Ibid., 13-14.

biblically conservative denominations to ordain women as preachers, pastors and elders. The Salvation Army began ordaining women in 1870, the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1891, and various Pentecostal churches in the early 1900s.

"Progressives" like to emphasize the apparently egalitarian position of the holiness/Pentecostal churches, a position they held along with a generally conservative approach to scripture, and a rejection of higher biblical criticism. But this is not the whole story. These churches tended to be a combination of complementarian and egalitarian, upholding women in various kinds of ministry, but also holding to the doctrine of male headship, especially in the home. Thus, the Salvation Army, despite ordaining both men and women, never allowed a woman to outrank her husband, and considered the wife the ministerial assistant of the husband, subject to his oversight.[42]

Similarly, nearly all of the Pentecostal groups drew a distinction between prophetic and priestly leadership. The former had to do with preaching and teaching, the latter with church administration and administrative oversight. All Pentecostal groups were united, at least at their beginnings, in allowing women the prophetic role of preaching and evangelism. But most of them reserved roles of administrative oversight within the church for men. These groups followed the model of having two tracks of ministry: licensed ministers, which could include women, who could preach, teach and evangelize; and ordained ministers, limited to men, who could baptize, organize churches, and ordain elders and pastors.[43]

Historians and scholars of the modern gender debate often overlook these meaningful gender distinctions in the holiness and Pentecostal groups.[44] They report on

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[42] Stanley, Susie, "The Promise Fulfilled: Women's Ministries in the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Wessinger, Catherine (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Press, 1996), 148.
[43] Barfoot, Charles & Sheppard, Gerald, "Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: The Changing role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (September), 10-12.
[44] For example, while he accepts that a number of holiness churches were complementarian, Chaves simply states that the Salvation Army starting ordaining women in 1870, and had granted "full formal equality to women from its beginning." Chaves, 98, 114-115. But this is to overlook the public women limitations a women experience in the Salvation Army if she was married. See, Stanley, Susie, "The Promise Fulfilled," 148.

the acceptance of women preaching and teaching and working in a pastoral role, and assume or imply that full equality was the rule or norm. When this is deviated from among these groups, it is often blamed on external fundamentalist influences that began to impact all biblically conservative denominations from the early 1900s forward. But this is simply not the case, as most of the holiness and Pentecostal churches had these distinctions from their early days.

As one scholar has noted, early on, "with the exception of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Pentecostal denominations prevented women from performing a minimal, negotiated set of priestly functions."[45] Some groups moved towards full equality, and then as quickly moved back again, as they emphasized first the prophetic, then priestly aspects of ministry. It seems that biblically conservative groups, such as the pentecostals, are at most ambivalent and conflicted over a purely egalitarian position, and frequently move back toward a complementarian view, either in theory, or in practice, or both.[46]

It is true that as fundamentalism began to impact American conservative Christianity more broadly, that Pentecostal and holiness groups were impacted by its inherent patriarchy, as were the Adventists. These groups not only moved away from women licensed ministers, but even away from allowing women public positions of leadership at all, and even limited their preaching and teaching.[47] Still, these groups had a much higher percentage of female participation in leadership than other groups. Though whether this was from choice or necessity, or some combination of the two, is uncertain. Pentecostal churches had a percentage of women membership about 10% higher than other denominations. In the 1920s and 30s, this meant that women made up nearly 2/3 of the Pentecostal denominations, whereas in other denominations, they

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[45] Barfoot & Sheppard, "Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion," 5.

[46] Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 170-176; as one women scholar put it, "males founded Pentecostalism, and males dominate the leadership roles in Pentecostalism . . . [and] generally dominate the public and political aspects of Pentecostalism." "Elaine Lawless, "No So Different a Story After All: Pentecostal Women in the Pulpit," in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions*, ed. Wessinger, Catherine (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 41.

[47] Chaves, 109-113; Stanley, Susie, "The Promise Fulfilled," 148-150.

accounted for a little more than half.[48]

While not embracing an explicitly patriarchal position, in practice many churches, including the Adventists,[49] in the 1920s and 30s moved to a semi-patriarchal position. Male ministers and preachers became strongly preferred over women. But the influence of this creeping patriarchy, baleful as it was, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that many holiness/Pentecostal churches were originally, as the early Adventist church was, much more complementarian in their outlook and practices, rather than being purely egalitarian, as they are at times portrayed today.

The African American churches have their own story, shaped by their rise from the conditions of slavery, and from the continuing discrimination found in the white churches they initially entered. Resistance to the abusive hierarchy that constantly surrounded them tended to make black Americans suspicious of any hierarchy or hint of discrimination. From early days, they welcomed women as exhorters and prophesiers, and at least one of the major denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, ordained women pastors as early as 1898. A number of the others followed in the 1950s and 1960s, including the AME Church and the CME Church.[50] All of these churches, however, have remained strongly resistant to homosexual practices.

It is important to note, though, that while the black churches have been supportive of black female leadership in theory, in practice these biblically conservative denominations show a preference at the local level for male pastors. In most of the historically black churches, despite accepting female equality for a half to a full century, female pastors typically represent about 3% of the pastorate.[51] There are, it seems, a higher percentage of ordained women elders in these churches. But it is interesting also to note that while most evangelical churches are at about 60% to 2/3rds women, black

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[48] Wacker, *Heaven Below,* 161.

[49] See Supra, p. 13.

[50] Chaves records the AME Church as accepting women pastors in 1960 (Chaves, 17), but Jualynne Dodson, in a scholarly article on the AME Church, gives the date as 1948. Dodson, Jualynne, "Women's Ministries and the African Methodist Episcopal Tradition," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed., Wessinger, Catherine (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 124-125.

[51] See Appendix description of the AME churches.

churches are generally about 75% female to 25% male.[52] Whether this gender disparity necessitates a greater allowance of women leadership, or whether female leadership is somehow partly causative of the disparity, are interesting questions that would require further study to resolve.

E. Group 5 – Restorationist Churches – Anabaptist, Baptist, Adventist

In the final group are those churches that are least dependent, at least overtly, on tradition and creed, and most open to overturning practices that are not established on the Bible. The Restorationist movement in early 19th century America included groups coming out of a variety of churches and identifying themselves simply as "the Christians," or the "Christian Connection." These were the roots of some of the Churches of God, as well as some segments of the Disciples of Christ. Joseph Bates and James White were affiliated with the Christian Connection before they became Adventists, bringing the non-creedal spirit with them.

These Restorationist groups had a very similar outlook and approach as another group that started at the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation, the evangelical Anabaptists. This group of "radical" Protestants had a high view of scripture, and a desire to build the church from scratch, completely apart from the civil state. The heirs of this early group include the Mennonites, Brethren, and the Baptists.[53] I have thus included these and their related denominations in the Restorationist group.

Despite feeling entirely free, and even opposed to, social convention, at least where it differed from biblical teachings, the Restorationist groups were generally complementarian in their gender outlooks. The Baptists, for instance, early on had a good number of women preachers and evangelists, but did not ordain them as presiding elders. In fact, it was the Baptists who began the practice in America of licensing women preachers, rather than ordaining them, in 1815.[54] Baptists typically have a highly

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[52] The Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, May 8 to Aug., 13, 2007.

[53] Baptists are divided into Calvinist/Predestinarian and free-will groups, and a number of the Calvinist Baptist groups are probably best thought of as part of the Calvinist/Reformed group discussed above.

[54] Blevins, Carolyn DeArmond, "Women and the Baptist Experience," *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Wessinger, Catherine (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), 172-173.

congregational polity, and it is not uncommon for individual congregations to move ahead on certain issues without full denominational support. Thus, various Baptist churches appear on the list of ordaining women pastors from the 1890s through the 1920s.[55]

The reality was, though, that the vast majority of Baptists churches were not ordaining women, but rather opposed the idea. This changed somewhat in 1964, when the largest Baptist group, the Southern Baptist Convention, voted to ordain women. In the following years, however, the SBC reconsidered its action, and in the 1980s and 1990s, rolled that decision back. While some local congregations persist, the SBC has made the family and male headship a fundamental belief, and some churches are disciplined if they choose to ordain female pastors.[56]

Another major restorationist church is the Disciples of Christ, tracing their heritage to the movements shepherded by Barton Stone and the father and son Campbells. In their early days, these groups were complementarian, but in the late 1880s, the relatively large and successful Disciples of Christ chose to ordain women. The movement continued to flourish into the 1920s and 30s, but it went the way of the mainline Protestant denominations, being leavened by higher biblical criticism, and becoming active in the ecumenical movement. After the 1950s, it experiences a rather precipitous decline, going from more than 2 million members, to somewhere around 600,000 today. The church has also become open to homosexual practices, with various regions and localities of the church opening up to membership for openly practicing gays and lesbians.[57]

A group very close to the Seventh-day Adventist church is the Advent Christian churches. These came out of the Great Disappointment, and did not adopt the Sabbath or the Sanctuary, but continued on preaching the Advent. This group adopted women's ordination in 1860, one of the first churches to do so on a denominational basis. This group has generally decided Biblically conservative, I can find no evidences of meaningful

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[55] See Appendix.
[56] See Appendix.
[57] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Church_%28Disciples_of_Christ%29#Membership_trends; http://www.gladalliance.org/open-affirming/directory (viewed on July 3, 2013.)

connections to gay rights issues. But if there is anything that characterizes the church as a whole, it is utter stagnation.

The Advent Christians numbered about 25,000 in 1850, when the Seventh-day Adventists numbered about 5,000. In 1925, the Advent Christians still numbered about 25,000, whereas the SDAs had grown to more than 110,000.[58] Today, when SDAs are around 1 million in America and 17 million worldwide, the Advent Christians still number about 25,000 in North America, with only an additional 100,000 claimed overseas.[59]

It would not be historically sound to blame the stagnation of the Advent Christians on their approach to issues of gender and leadership. But it is fair to point out that groups with similar roots to Adventism have not found a purely egalitarian approach to issues of gender and leadership to be a church-growth enhancer. Indeed, the consistent pattern within the Restorationist group is that the churches that are the fastest growing, the Southern Baptists and the Seventh-day Adventists, have pursued a complementarian, and at times quasi-patriarchal model. On the other hand, the churches that were earliest and first to embrace egalitarianism have generally either experienced no growth over the last century, such as the Adventists or the American Baptists Churches, or had precipitous decline, as seen by the Disciples of Christ.

One of the few exceptions to the decline or stagnation in "progressive" gender denominations seems to be the Mennonite Church USA, though they cannot be fairly be called early adopters. It was not until 1973 that they allowed for women's ordination, but since that time they have continued to grow at a moderate pace. The Mennonite Church USA, however, is of relatively small size, about 105,000 in 2009, so its experience may be hard to generalize from. It also seems that, while formally opposing homosexual practice, that there has been significant internal agitation in the Mennonite Church USA to change its stance on sexual practices. (See the appendix.)

Conclusion

[58] http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1108.asp; http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1101.asp (viewed on 7/3/2013.)
[59] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent_Christian_Church#Statistics (viewed on 7/3/2013.)

The above stories challenge aspects of both the liberal and conservative telling of history in relation to gender, leadership, and the Church. It is simply not true that only biblically liberal churches have accepted women's ordination, or that ordaining women necessarily leads to more liberal biblical views, such as the embrace of higher criticism or homosexuality. But it is true that churches that liberalize their theology do almost inevitably embrace women's ordination, and then many do continue on to embrace homosexuality. And it also appears to be true that biblically conservative churches that ordain women do face greater internal agitation on the question of homosexual practice.

But, as we can see especially from the history of the Presbyterians—the originators of views of verbal inspiration and inerrancy and promoters of patriarchy—taking extreme defensive positions in relation to gender and leadership actually can have the opposite effect, and result in pushing major portions of the church towards the opposite extreme of liberal, feminist, often pro-gay, equality. On the other hand, ordaining women to stay up with the times and to remain culturally relevant appears also to have the opposite effect. There is greater correlation between embrace of gender equality in leadership and membership stagnation or even decline.

Ultimately, the appropriate approach to gender and leadership within the church must be decided by reference to Biblical teaching, and not by the lessons of culture or history. But an understanding of history and culture can help us understand the range of possible biblical approaches. It can also open our minds to the truth that certain readings of the Bible are driven more by the influence of either tradition (in the case of the patriarchal camp) or culture (in the matter of the liberal feminist camp). It can reveal that even the more moderate complementarian and egalitarian groups are haunted and somewhat shaped by those two extremes. Whatever détente or concord is reached within the Adventist church between the two moderate camps, all needs to be sensitive to and guard against the pitfalls found on either extreme—and open to the importance of achieving a biblically-faithful balance between gender roles and the principle of gender fairness, both of which are taught in Scripture.

Appendix

U.S. Churches that Ordain Women, Their Stance Towards Homosexuality, and Their Growth Patterns

Church[1]	**Ordain Women**	**Accept Homosexual Practice?**	**Growth – North America**[2]
United Church of Christ (Mainline Congregationalists)	Yes – 1853 (though not widespread until the 1920s)	Since 1985, generally, yes.[3]	About 1 million and declining – 2 million at time of merger in 1957[4]
Conservative Congregational Christian Conf.	Some – Left to local church.	No	About 50,000 and growing – split from Mainline in 1945
Advent Christian Church	Yes - 1860	No	About 25,000 and static since 1925
Universalist Church of America	Yes – 1863	Yes	About 160,000
Christian Church (General Convention)	Yes - 1867	Yes – since 1985 as merged with UCC in 1957	Part of UCC
Salvation Army	Yes – 1870 (though women serve in positions subject to husband)	No	400,000 in U.S.; 1.4 million worldwide – regular growth
American Unitarian Association	Yes - 1871	Yes – 1984	About 215,000 decline from about 500,000 in 1970s

[1] The listed churches are based on the list found in Chavez, *Ordaining Women,* 16-17.
[2] Accept where otherwise noted, church size statistics taken from The Association of Religious Date Archives at http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1425.asp
[3] http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/;http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality#United_Church_of_Christ
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ#Membership (viewed on 6/2013)

Church of God (Anderson)	Yes – 1885	No[5]	About 250,000, steady growth except last 10 years
Disciples of Christ	Yes – 1888	Some - Decided regionally and , locally[6]	About 660,000; declining from a high of nearly 2 million in 1950s
Church of the United Brethren in Christ	Yes - 1889	Not church wide, but a number of congregations endorse[7]	23,000 – no meaningful growth over last century or so.
Weslyan Methodist Church	Yes – 1891	Formally, no, but practice appears to vary with locality.[8]	Some growth; merger in 1968 with Wesleyan Church
Methodist Protestant Church	Yes – 1892	Formally, no, but practice appears to vary with locality.[9]	Merged into United Methodist Church – declined by nearly 50% in last 50 years
National Baptist Convention, USA (historically black)	Yes - 1895	Generally not[10]	5 million – mostly steady growth through 20th century
Pentecostal Holiness Church	Yes – 1895, preaching and teaching, but women not to hold all leadership positions	No.	330, 000 in U.S.; 3.4 million worldwide – steady growth
Pilgrim Holiness	1897 - preaching	No.	About 32,000

[5]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality#Summary_of_denominational_positions_in_North_America_and_Europe

[6] http://www.accsd.org/site/page/christian-church-disciples-of-christ

[7]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality#Mennonite_Churches

[8] http://www.unitedmethodistreporter.com/2012/08/conferences-react-to-umc-stance-on-gay-issues/

[9] http://www.unitedmethodistreporter.com/2012/08/conferences-react-to-umc-stance-on-gay-issues/

[10] http://www.nbc12.com/story/19809729/baptist-church-ordains-gay-man-asked-to-leave-baptist-group

Church	and teaching, but women not to hold all leadership positions		when merged with Wesleyan Church in 1968
AME Zion Church	1898 –formally, yes, but in practice, very limited, less than 3% female clergy in historically Black churches	No.	1.4 million – dramatic growth through 20th century, but decline over last decade
Friends United	1902	Generally Opposed[11]	About 35,000, decline of 50% since early 1900s
Northern Baptist Convention aka American Baptist Churches in USA	1907[12] - Mixed, decided locally	No[13]	1.3 million – declined by 200,000 over the last fifty years.
Church of the Nazarene (Pentecostal)	1908	No	640,000 in US; steady growth
Baptist General Conference	1918 – mixed, decided locally	No	195,000; steady growth
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	1921	Generally Opposed[14]	About 65,000; 40% decline over last 40 years.
Churches of God, General	1923	?	32,000; stagnation over last century

[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_Quakerism#North_America
[12] http://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ordain.pdf
[13] http://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/homosexuality.pdf
[14] http://johnvest.com/2010/07/26/what-the-pcusa-could-learn-from-cumberland-presbyterians/

Conference			
Community Churches, Int. Council	1923	Yes[15]	69,000; decline of 60% over last 30 years.
General Association of General Baptists	1925 - Mixed, decided locally – About 8% in 2002[16]	Generally Not[17]	45,000; decline of 40% in last 20 years
International Church of the Foursquare Gospel	1927	No[18]	350,000 in U.S.; 8 million worldwide; dramatic growth
Assemblies of God	1935[19]	No[20]	About 3 million in the U.S.; 65 million worldwide; dramatic growth
Open Bible Standard Churches (Pentecostal)	1935	No	45,000 – steady growth
Evangelical and Reformed Church aka United Church of Christ	1948	Yes	About 1 million and declining –2 million at time of merger in 1957[21]
Presbyterian Church in the USA (North)	1956	Yes.	Part of Presbyterian Church, USA – 2.7

[15] http://www.holierthanthou.info/denominations/community.html
[16]http://www.christianethicstoday.com/cetart/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.main&ArtID=777
[17]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality#Baptists
[18] http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-pentecostals
[19]http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/PP_The_Role_of_Women_in_Ministry.pdf
[20] http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-pentecostals
[21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ#Membership

			million and dramatically declining
Methodist Church	1956	Officially not, but there is meaningful division in American Methodism[22]	7.7 million – United Methodist Church – dramatic decline of 50% in 40 years
Church of the Brethren	1958 – formally, but in practice limited. 15% women by 2000	Not formally, but some exceptions.[23]	About 125,000 – 70% decline in 40 years
United Presbyterian Church, North America	1958	Yes.	Part of Presbyterian Church, USA – 1.9 million and dramatic decline
AME Episcopal	1960 - formally, yes, but in practice, very limited, less than 3% female clergy in Black churches	No[24]	2.5 million – decline of 1/3 in last 20 years
Christian Congregation	1961	No	About 1 million and declining – 2 million at time of merger in 1957 with United Church of Christ[25]
Presbyterian Church, US (South)	1964	Yes	Part of Presbyterian Church, USA – 1.9 million and declining

[22] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/06/nyregion/caught-in-methodisms-split-over-same-sex-marriage.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
[23] http://www.brethren.org/news/2011/committee-announces-decisions-for-2012-annual-conference.html; http://www.peacecob.org/aboutourchurchpastor.html
[24] http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-african-methodist-episcopal-church
[25] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ#Membership

Southern Baptist Convention	1964, but reversed in 1990s	No	16 million; dramatic growth in 20th century, stagnation over last 10 years
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church	1966 - formally, yes, but in practice, very limited, less than 3% female clergy in black churches	No[26]	850,000; strong growth, though stagnant in last decade
Evangelical United Brethren Church	1968	Officially not, but there is meaningful division in Methodism[27]	Merged with United Methodists in 1968
American Lutheran Church aka Evangelical Lutheran Church since 1987	1970	Yes – formally adopted ordination of openly gay clergy in 2009[28]	In 1987 Became Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with about 5.2 million members – rapid loss with about 4 million recently
Lutheran Church in America aka Evangelical Lutheran Church since 1987	1970	Yes – formally adopted ordination of openly gay clergy in 2009[29]	In 1987 became Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - 4 million members- but rapid loss with a decline of 500,000 since 2009

[26] http://www.christianpost.com/news/african-methodist-episcopal-church-rejects-gay-147-marriage-148-blessing-rights-2783/

[27] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/06/nyregion/caught-in-methodisms-split-over-same-sex-marriage.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

[28]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America#Ordination_of_lesbian.2C_gay.2C_bisexual.2C_and_transgendered_clergy

[29]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America#Ordination_of_lesbian.2C_gay.2C_bisexual.2C_and_transgendered_clergy

Mennonite Church	1973	Generally opposed, but some variation allowed in local congregations and conferences.[30]	About 105,000 – stagnant for the last 30 years
Free Methodist Church, North America	1974	No[31]	75,000 – stagnant for last 30 years
Evangelical Covenant Church (Swedish Lutheran)	1976	No.	About 114,000 – general growth since the 1920s
Episcopal Church	1976 – may ordain 1994 – may oppose 1997 – may not oppose, ordination of women is mandatory	Yes in 2000, ordination in 2009	About 2 million, down from a high of 3.5 million in the 1960s
Reformed Church in America	1979 1980 – conscience clause for those not wanting to participate 2012 – conscience clause stricken	No, but official recognition of division within church[32]	240,000 and declining – down from a high of 380,00- in the 1960s, but still at about 350,000 in 1979
Worldwide Church of God *aka* Grace Communion International	Yes – 2006, after giving up Sabbath in 1995[33]	No	38,000 worldwide - dramatically declining in recent years

[30] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mennonite#Sexuality.2C_marriage.2C_and_family_mores;http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality#Mennonite_Churches

[31] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_Methodism#Free_Methodist_Church

[32] https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=492

[33] https://www.gci.org/church/ministry/women11.